## RAMON LULL AND ECSTATIC KABBALAH

A PRELIMINARY OBSERVATION\*

In memoriam Frances A. Yates

The possible relationship between some of Ramon Lull's views and the Jewish Kabbalah has already been discussed by several scholars; according to J. M. Millás-Vallicrosa, Lull might have been influenced by the Kabbalistic conception of the Sefirot in his doctrine of dignitates Dei. A more cautious opinion can be found in Charles Singer's statement: 'Lull was under strong Neo-Platonic influence, and into Neo-Platonic thought he was able to fit Cabalist development'.

Indeed, the studies of the late Dame Frances A. Yates seem to finalize this issue: it is most probable that Lull was influenced by Christian Neo-Platonic sources such as Pseudo-Dionysius whose views reached him through the works of John Scotus Eriugena.<sup>3</sup> Yates's conclusion regarding the Neo-Platonic sources of Lull was accepted by Gershom Scholem<sup>4</sup> and, unless further studies uncover new material, it seems that the influence of the theosophical Kabbalah on Lull's conception of *dignitates Dei* can be disregarded. If there are some similarities between the Kabbalistic Sefirot and Lull's

dignitates they may be the result of the influence of common sources and Scotus Eriugena may indeed be considered just such a source.<sup>5</sup>

However, there is still another area of Lull's thought whose possible affinity to Kabbalistic issues is worth a detailed discussion: namely Lull's theory of ars combinatoria. I should like to analyse briefly the probability of the historical relationship between this important facet of Lull's thought and the ecstatic Kabbalah. As the starting point of our discussion I shall first discuss an illuminating remark of Pico della Mirandola on this subject. The confirmation of Pico's observation on the affinity between Lull and Kabbalah constitutes the major point of the following study.

In his *Apologia* Pico della Mirandola describes a certain kind of Kabbalah in these words: 'quae dicitur ars combinandi ... et est simile quid, sicut apud nostros dicitur ars Raymundi, licet forte diuerso modo procedant'. The nature of this *ars combinandi* is described by Pico thus: 'Illa enim ars combinandi, est quam ego in conclusionibus meis uoco, Alphabetarium reuolutionem'. Indeed, in one of his Kabbalistic *Conclusiones*, Pico asserts: 'Prima est scientia quam ego uoco Alphabetariae reuolutionis correspondentem parti philosophiae, quam ego philosophiam catholicam uoco'. 8

According to these assessments there is a certain affinity between ars Raimundi and a certain brand of Kabbalah, whose main subject is the combination of the letters of the alphabet. This Kabbalah is compared by Pico with the catholic, i.e. universal or

<sup>\*</sup> This study was presented as a lecture at the III Colloqui d'Estudis Catalans a Nord-America, University of Toronto, 17 April 1982. Two distinguished scholars of Lull's thought who attended this lecture, J. N. Hillgarth and R. Pring-Mill, kindly encouraged me to pursue the line there proposed, a first result of this ongoing interest being the present observation.

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'Algunas relaciones entre la doctrina luliana y la Cabala', Sefarad, XVIII, 1958, pp. 241–53. See also L. I. Newman, Jewish Influences on Christian Reform Movements, New York 1925, pp. 182–183, where the author asserts that 'it is certain that he [i.e. Lull] made use in his interpretation of Scripture of the Jewish methods of Gematria, Notaricon and Ziruf and regarded the Kabbalah as a divine science and a true revelation of the soul'. This statement is however based upon the false assumption that Lull is the author of the spurious De auditu kabbalistico.

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<sup>2</sup> The Legacy of Israel, ed. E. Bevan and C. Singer, Oxford 1927, p. 274.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Lull and Bruno—Collected Essays, 1, London, Boston and Henley 1982, pp. 78–121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> G. Scholem, Les Origines de la Kabbale, Paris 1966, p. 412 n. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Scholem, ibid., index, s.v. Erigène. G. Sed-Rajna, 'L'influence de Jean Scot sur la doctrine du Kabbaliste Azriel de Gérone', Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie, Paris 1977, pp. 453–65; M. Idel, 'The Sefirot above the Sefirot' (Hebrew), Tarbiz, LI, 1982, pp. 242–43, 246, 261, 267, 277.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Opera Omnia, Basle 1572, p. 180. Many years ago, my friend Shalom Rosenberg, of the Hebrew University, kindly pointed out to me the possible relationship between Lull's and Abulafia's usage of the circles; however, we shall see below that his remark, already adumbrated by Scholem and Yates (see n. 9 below), does not take into account the particular usage Abulafia made of circles in his works, where apparently they are never employed in order to discover new theological or scientific information.

ibid., p. 181.
 ibid., p. 108.

comprehensive, philosophy. The identity of this Kabbalistic school as the ecstatic or the prophetic Kabbalah was proposed by Scholem and Yates.<sup>9</sup> Indeed this type of Kabbalah is much interested in the combining of letters, mostly those which compose the Divine names, in order to achieve ecstatic experiences. However, in spite of the general similarity between this Kabbalah and the art of Lull, there are at least two main discrepancies between the particular description of the Kabbalah in Pico's passage and the ecstatic Kabbalah.

All we know from Pico is that the Kabbalah he has in mind deals with changing the places of letters in the alphabetsrevolutio-whereas the ecstatic Kabbalah was mainly interested in combinations of letters which constitute the Divine names. It is reasonable to assume that the form used by Pico-revolutio-may signify not only changing the places of letters in general, but rather in a particular way, by a certain kind of rotation. Such an understanding is corroborated by Lull's art which uses concentric circles. According to Pico: 'ars combinandi ... est modus quidam procedendi in scientiis'. 10 Therefore the art of combination is a method employed to attain scientia (wisdom), whereas the ecstatic Kabbalah focuses upon the attainment of prophecy or states of mystical union.

Given these two important differences between the description of that Kabbalah which is similar to the Lullian art and the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, the question may be asked whether indeed Pico had in mind Abulafia's Kabbalah in the passages mentioned above. If we exclude the proposal of Scholem and Yates on the basis of the discrepancies just mentioned, is there a better alternative explanation of what Pico says? It seems that such an alternative indeed exists. It is not only more consonant with Pico's Kabbalah but may also better explain the emergence of Lull's art of combination.

A thirteenth-century commentary on the liturgy, an anonymous work which has not attracted the attention of Kabbalah scholars,

<sup>9</sup> G. Scholem, 'Considérations sur l'histoire des débuts de la Kabbale chrétienne', in Kabbalistes chrétiens, Paris 1979, p. 41 n. 10; F. A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, Chicago and London 1979, p. 96.

10 Opera Omnia (as in n. 6), p. 180.

survives in several manuscripts. 11 Its first part, the longest, deals with two figures, one of which consists of three concentric circles, each containing one alphabet. This figure (Pl. 17b) corresponds to Pico's reference to the revolutio alphabetorum since the concentric circles were intended to revolve in order to generate all possible combinations of the letters of the alphabets.

The second figure (Pl. l6c) is a table wherein different concepts are attributed to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So, for example, the letter alef symbolizes 'Or *Kadmon*, i.e. Primeval Light; El = God; 'Adon = Lord; 'Ehad = One; 'Emet = Truth, etc. According to the anonymous Kabbalist we can use the concepts in the table to explain the theological meaning of the various combinations of the letters of the alphabets inscribed in the concentric circles. Many examples of such interpretations can be adduced but I shall confine myself to a translation of only one of them. When dealing with the combination of the letters dalet and kof, the author writes: 12 'Da'at (knowledge) and Kedushah (Holiness): it shows that out of this combination appear the ideas of the perfect righteous who apprehend the knowledge of the Holy and pure ideas which emanate from this combination'. It is obvious that this technique of interpreting the meaning of the various combinations of letters resulting from the revolving of the concentric circles corresponds to the *scientia* mentioned by Pico. It seems that Pico in fact referred to the specific Kabbalistic system to be found in another commentary of the anonymous Kabbalist, a commentary to Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, a late Midrashic composition unfortunately lost, though quoted several times in the commentary on the liturgy.<sup>13</sup> In one instance the anonymous Kabbalist refers to a discussion in his commentary on Pirkei de-

<sup>11</sup> On this work see Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'Perush 'al Tefilot' in Kovez Mada'y Likhvod Moshe Shor, New York 1945, pp. 113-126 where a short introduction precedes the printing of the beginning of the commentary. The list of manuscripts compiled by Heschel has to be complemented by the identification of additional manuscripts of this work. See, for the time being, M. Idel, R. Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrines, Ph. D. Dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 77–78, 84 n. 38 (Hebrew).

12 Paris, BN, MS hébr. 848, fol. 7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> See e.g. Heschel (as in n. 11), p. 120.

Rabbi Eliezer which deals with the theory of combination of letters and their theological interpretation in the same way in which this subject is treated in the extant work. <sup>14</sup> It is possible, at least theoretically, that Pico was acquainted with the lost work.

The two works mentioned above are commentaries upon texts which have nothing to do with any theory of combination of letters and, at least on the basis of the commentary on the liturgy, the anonymous author has artificially superimposed an exegetical technique which does not clarify the text being commented upon. There is therefore good reason to see this technique not as an ad hoc innovation but, as the author asserts, as an already existing device. 15

To sum up: a particular type of Kabbalah, close to but not identical with Abraham Abulafia's mystical thought, was in existence in the thirteenth century, and was perceived by Pico as especially similar to the art of Ramon Lull.

The question I now propose is whether Pico's assessment is merely a coincidence. namely that Pico's statement has no more than a phenomenological value, or whether Pico indeed perceived a certain affinity which is the result of an historical relationship between Kabbalah and Lull's system. Let us begin with chronological matters. The ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, which is the Kabbalistic system closest to that exposed in the commentary on the liturgy, made its first appearance in Barcelona, where Abulafia not only received his original revelation but also studied twelve commentaries on the Book of Creation ('Sefer Yezirah') in 1270.16 Though Catalonia may not be the only region where Kab-

balistic ideas close to those of Abulafia were in existence, 17 it seems undeniable that he received the inspiration for his particular type of Kabbalah itself in Barcelona. For the exact date when the anonymous commentary on the liturgy was written no definitive data are available; Scholem proposed the end of the thirteenth century 18 without elaborating on his reasons. It seems to me that an earlier dating is more appropriate on the basis of an examination of the sources used by the anonymous Kabbalist. The most important Kabbalistic source recurring in our text is the Book of Bahir, one of the earliest Kabbalistic works, already known at the beginning of the thirteenth century<sup>19</sup> but unfortunately useless for an exact dating of the commentary. However, the other source which clearly influenced the commentary is Rabbi 'Ezra of Gerona's commentary on the Talmudic Aggadot, though this Geronese text is nowhere quoted explicitly; it is nevertheless obvious that our commentary draws upon the text of R. 'Ezra, copying several sentences verbatim.<sup>20</sup> At present only one additional Kabbalistic source which may have been written later than R. 'Ezra's time can be traced; it is a reference to the Book of Speculation ('Sefer ha-'Tyyun'), a Kabbalistic work whose date and place of writing are still a matter of debate among scholars.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Some Kabbalists in Castile at the beginning of the second half of the thirteenth century were also interested in revelatory experiences and techniques similar to Abulafia's, but I am inclined to dismiss the possibility that the Castilian, rather than the Catalonian, Kabbalists might have influenced Lull.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 1974, p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> This text is quoted many times in the commentary and it may serve as a potential source for establishing an early version of the *Book of Bahir*.

20 Compare, e.g., Paris, BN, MS hébr. 848, fol. 12<sup>r</sup>

with R. Ezra's commentary to the Talmudic Aggadot printed in *Likutey Shikhehah ufeah*, Ferrara 1556, fol. 6°. Other examples will be discussed in my elaborate Hebrew study of the commentary on the liturgy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> The quotation from the *Book of Speculation* was printed by G. Scholem in *Kiryat Sefer*, 1, 1923–25, pp. 285–86, and analysed in M. Idel, 'The World of the Angels in Human Shape' (Hebrew), in *Isaiah Tishby Festschrift*, eds J. Dan and J. Hacker, Jerusalem 1986, pp. 27–28. There are two main proposals for the dating of writings connected to the *Book of Speculation*. Allusions to both appear in Scholem's studies: an early one—the beginning of the thirteenth century in Provence; and a later one—the middle of this century in Castile. No definite evidence has yet been adduced to finalize this problem. See also n. 17 above.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> ibid., p. 117, translated from Paris, BN, MS hébr. 848.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> See Paris, BN, MS hébr. 848, fol. 4<sup>r</sup>: 'I have already explained ancient issues in work written previously (to the commentary on the liturgy) and I called it by the name The Conciliator of the Mind of the Questioner: far-reaching Questions.'

far-reaching Questions.'

16 The list of these commentaries was printed by Adolph Jellinek, Bet HaMidrasch, Jerusalem 1967, III, p. xi (German); 'Sefer Yezirah' played a crucial role in the Kabbalistic system of Abulafia. On the possible influence of this work on Lull, see E. W. Platzeck, 'Descubrimiento y esencia del arte del Bto Ramón Lull', Estudios Iulianos, VIII, 1964, pp. 137–54; idem, Raimund Lull, Rome-Düsseldorf 1962–1964, 1, pp. 327–36.

Thus the major influence of the Geronese Kabbalist on the anonymous commentary suggests also a tentative location of the place where it was written, namely Catalonia. Therefore the comparison of the conceptual content of the anonymous commentary to other Kabbalistic writings points to the third quarter of the thirteenth century. I should like to emphasize that this dating is no more than an approximation, but nevertheless a very reasonable one. This date and location of the anonymous commentary are implicitly also an answer to the question of the relationship between Lull's theory and the ecstatic Kabbalah; since the Catalan Christian thinker began his mystical and literary career only in 1270, the direction of influence seems to be from Jewish to Christian texts. Such a conclusion is based, as I should like to remind the reader, upon a rather speculative dating of a most important Kabbalistic text, though certain other details, which have nothing to do with our dating, seemingly strengthen our conclusion.

Lull is the author of *Logica Nova* (1305), a treatise based more upon his own ars rather than on classic Aristotelian logic; since his ars essentially consists of the use of concentric circles it follows that his logic is also based upon this device (Pl. 17c). A similar view of logic is to be found in one of Abraham Abulafia's works;22 according to him, the logical works of Aristotle cannot be considered a science like physics or metaphysics: they are, according to the medieval concept of logic, tools to be used in the investigation of other speculative domains. However, the science of the combination of letters is regarded by Abulafia as 'the inner and superior logic', the way to understanding the nature of truth and error. 23

One of the devices used by Lull in order to display a certain type of combination of letters is the triangle (Pl. 17e); as in the case of the concentric circles and the explanatory tables (Pl. 17a), in this instance too no precedent for Lull's figure has been pointed out. An interesting parallel to Lull is found, however, in a Jewish mystical text, in this case a commentary on the Book of Creation ('Sefer Yezirah') by the early thirteenthcentury Ashkenazi author R. Eleazar of Worms (Pl. 17d),<sup>24</sup> known and studied in Barcelona in 1270 and apparently even earlier, as Abraham Abulafia testifies. 25 In passing, this work and the Ashkenazi mystical theories and techniques in general were influential in the emergence of the ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>26</sup>

Last but not least, Lull was in contact with important Jewish figures living in Barcelona, as the incipit of a lost work of his demonstrates.<sup>27</sup> Three persons are mentioned in this *incipit* by name: 'Abram Denaret', 'Rabbi Aaron' and 'Rabbi Ben Jue Salomon'. As Millás-Vallicrosa has already indicated,28 the first name refers to the most important leader of Catalan Jewry, Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret; the second probably refers to Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Barcelona; the last, not identified by Millás-Vallicrosa, may stand for Rabbi Yehudah Salmon, also of Barcelona. Let us consider the possible implications of this relationship of Lull to the Catalan Jewish élite. Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret was a Kabbalist who taught Kabbalah to a strictly limited circle of students, 29 and it would be more than surprising if he were to disclose Kabbalistic secrets to a Christian. Moreover, not only was his Kabbalah different from the ecstatic one; he was the most important antagonist of Abraham Abulafia's activity and his ecstatic Kabbalah. 30 His colleague Rabbi Yehudah Salmon, at a certain period of his life, however, had good relations with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> See Abulafia's Sendschreiben über Philosophie und Kabbala, known according to its Hebrew name Sheva'r Netivot Ha-Torah, in Adolph Jellinek, Philosophie und

Kabbalah, I, Leipzig 1854, pp. 14–15.

<sup>23</sup> ibid., p. 15. See also M. Idel, 'Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah', in Midrash and Literature, eds G. H. Hartman and S. Budick, New Haven 1986, p. 149; idem, 'On the History of the Interdiction against the Study of Kabbalah before the age of Forty' (Hebrew), AJS Review, v, 1980, pp. 17–18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Perush Sefer Yezira, Przemyl 1853, fols 5bc, 17c-20b.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> cf. the testimony of Abulafia published by Jellinek

<sup>(</sup>as in n. 22).

26 See M. Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abraham

Abulafia, Albany 1987, ch. 1.
<sup>27</sup> J. M. Millás-Vallicrosa, El Liber predicationis contra Judeos' de Ramon Lull, Madrid-Barcelona 1957.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> ibid., p. 21. See also Jeremy Cohen, 'The Christian Adversary of Solomon ibn Adret', Jewish Quarterly

Review, [NS] LXXI, 1980, p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> See M. Idel, 'We have no Kabbalistic Tradition on This' in I. Twersky (ed.), Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (RAMBAN): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity, Cambridge Mass. 1983, p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> See Adret's Responsa, I, no. 548.

Abraham Abulafia.<sup>31</sup> At present we do not know whether Salmon studied issues related to ecstatic Kabbalah with Abulafia, or with other unknown Kabbalists in Barcelona. Neither then do we know whether he might have served as a channel for the transmission of Kabbalistic doctrines to Lull, his previous acquaintance, though his master, Abulafia, was ready to preach—and apparently did preach—to Christians in Italy about issues related to his messianic views and eventually on his Kabbalah.<sup>32</sup>

The possibility of a Kabbalistic influence on Lull has to be judged against the general background of his age: a new interest in Oriental languages and religions, including Hebrew and Jewish lore, which surfaced in two of Lull's contemporaries, Raymund Martini and Arnald of Villanova. The latter even wrote a treatise on the letters of the Tetragrammaton which may be considered the closest theological work to Kabbalah written by a Christian scholar up to this time.33 The interest of these authors, like that of their Italian Renaissance followers, was ostensibly of a missionary nature. However, in the case of Lull, the proposed influence of Kabbalah has to do mostly with the technical aspect of his thought rather than with its theological content, a fact which may facilitate the passage of a certain theory from one type of mysticism to another.

The considerations outlined above cannot stand as definitive evidence of the sources of Lull's theories; they are based upon similarities between the devices employed by Lull and his contemporary Kabbalists, or on circumstantial proofs which only rarely may solve such complex problems as the ultimate source of Lull's speculations. However, given the impasse that research on Lull's sources of his combinatory techniques has reached, in so far as the problem of precise parallels to the figures used by Lull is concerned, our proposal may open an avenue that might have remained closed after the diagnoses of Yates, Scholem or Platzeck. As the subtitle suggests, our present study is no more than a preliminary inroad into complicated issues, and it must be followed by other researches more elaborate and precise regarding the subjects of dating, of location, or—the most important desideratum—a study of the history, or the prehistory, of the ecstatic Kabbalah before the emergence of the Abulafian literary corpus.

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## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN ON THE TABERNACLE OF ORSANMICHELE\*

RCAGNA'S marble tabernacle in Orsanmichele (Pl. 18a) was executed at the behest of the confraternity of the Madonna di Orsanmichele to house their cult image, a panel painted by Bernardo Daddi in 1346-47.1 It was probably begun in 1352 and although signed and dated 1359 it was completed only about 1366 when two metalworkers, Piero del Migliore and Benincasa di Lotto, added the grating and other bronze ornaments.2

The tabernacle is divided into three tiers. A cupola half-hidden by triangular gables flanked by tall pinnacles surmounts a frieze of half-length figures in quadrilobe frames.

1949, pp. 75-105.

year 1366.

(hereafter ASF), Capitani di Orsanmichele, cod. 56, fols 34v, 48r; see also Steinweg (as in n. 1), p. 110, who, probably correctly, dates the four angels carrying candlesticks at the corner of the shrine to the same

<sup>31</sup> cf. Abulafia's letter addressed to Salmon in Adolph Jellinek, Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik, 1, Leipzig 1853,

p. 19.

32 cf. Abulafia's 'Sefer Ha-Ot. Apokalypse des Pseudo-Propheten und Pseudo-Messias Abraham Abulafia', in Jubelschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstage des Prof. Dr. H. Graetz, ed. A. Jellinek, Breslau 1887, p. 76.

33 See Joaquin Carreras Artau, 'La "Allocutio Super Tetragrammaton" de Arnaldo de Vilanova', Sefarad, IX,

<sup>\*</sup> I should like to thank Elizabeth McGrath for her help in the preparation of this Note.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For the confraternity, see S. La Sorsa, La compagnia d'Or San Michele: ovvero una pagina delle beneficenze in Toscana nel secolo XIV, Trani 1902. On the tabernacle see K. Steinweg, Andrea Orcagna; quellengeschichtliche und stilkritische Untersuchung, Strasbourg 1929, pp. 71-111; N. Rash Fabbri and N. Rutenberg, 'The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context', Art Bulletin, LXIII, 1981, pp. 385–405; A. De Surigny, 'Le Tabernacle de la Vierge dans l'église d'Or-san-Michele à Florence', Annales Archéologiques, xxvi, 1869, pp. 26–46, 77–95, 152–172.

<sup>2</sup> Documents in Archivio di Stato di Firenze



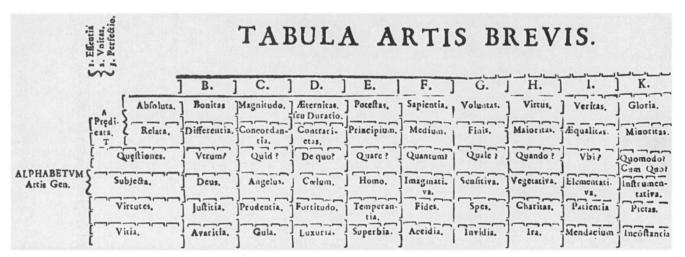
a—BMPD 201 a 10, fol. 2<sup>r</sup> (after Battista Franco) (p. 163)



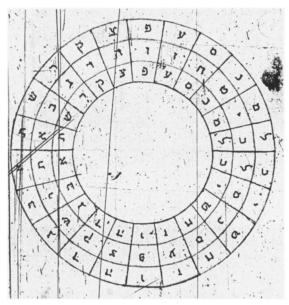
b—SJSM, fol. 60° (after Guido Reni) (p. 163)



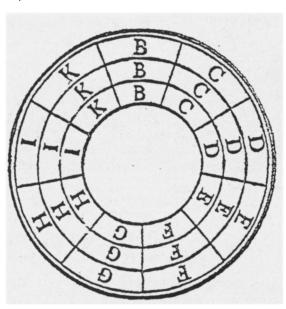
c—Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Hébr. 848, fols 4<sup>v</sup>-5<sup>r</sup> (p. 171)



a—Tabula Artis Brevis from Lull, Opuscula, I, Palma 1744 (p. 173)



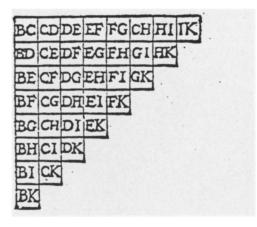
b—Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Hébr. 848, fol. 4<sup>r</sup> (p. 171)



c—Concentric circles from Lull, Ars Brevis, Strasbourg 1617 (p. 173)



d—Table of combinations of letters, from R. Eleazar of Worms's Commentary on Sefer Yezirah, Przemyl 1853, fol. 18<sup>a</sup> (p. 173)



e—Table of combinations of letters from Lull, *Ars Brevis*, Strasbourg 1617 (p. 173)